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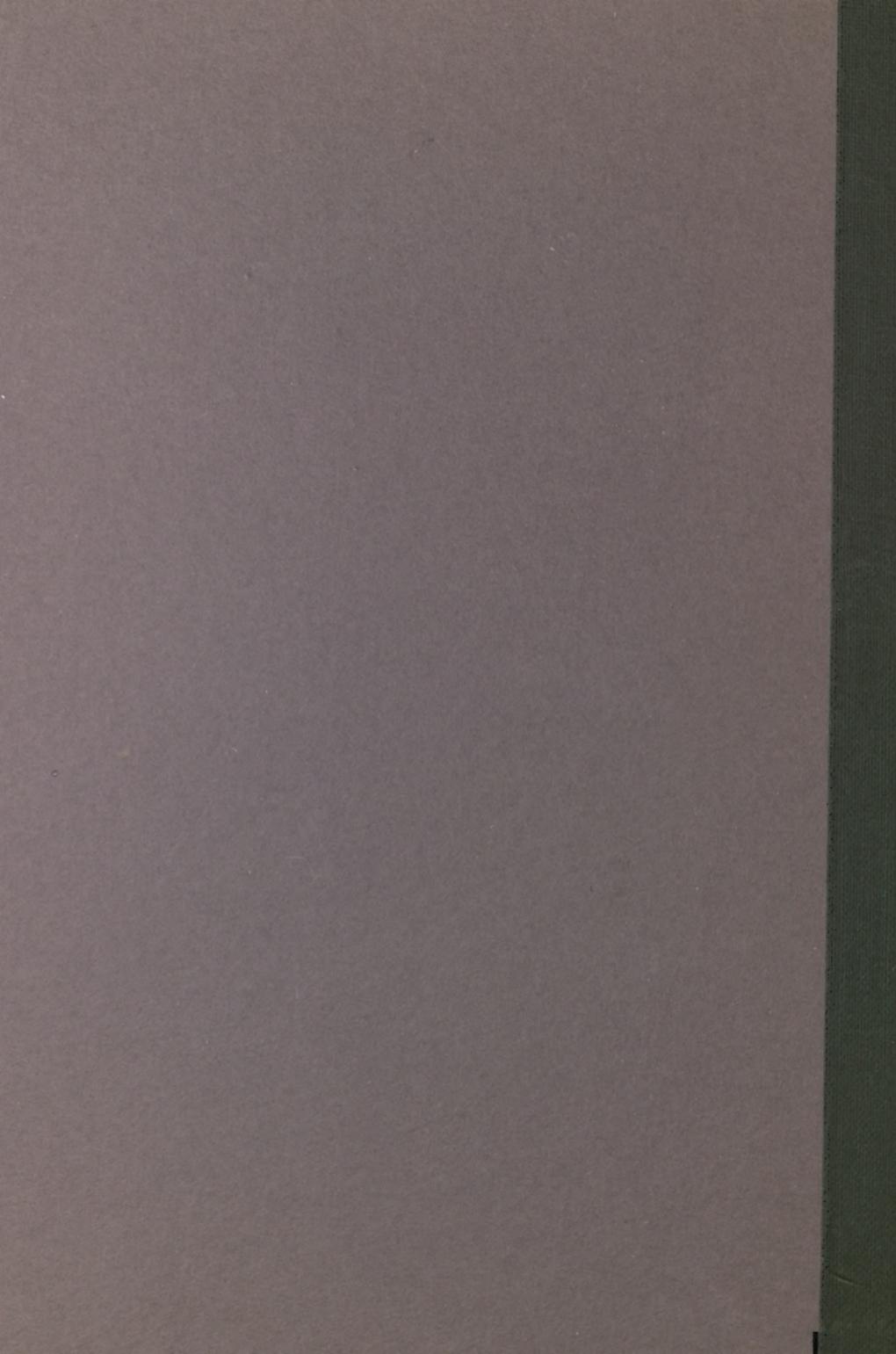
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ATLANTIS

BY

ERNEST W. V. CLIFTON.



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“Si tu veux, faisons un rêve.”

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ATLANTIS.

I.

A VOICE is on the mountains and the sea ;
And through the last cloud lingeringly and slow
The sun sinks down, 'mid trailing pageantry
Of gold and kingly purple. Far below,
From the cliff's base to the last molten fires
Of the horizon, the proud ocean lies
Scarce breathing, while the eternal vesper-hymn
Of nature's spirit choirs
From cave to cave rolls its soft harmonies,
Murmuring and mingling to the great world's brim.

II.

Such sight they saw, such call methinks they heard,
Who first set sail upon the deep to find
The island of the West that lies unstirred
By rain or snow or blast of wandering wind.
—Such sight, such call, when black against the sun
Their tall ship stood upon the sandy shore,
And by the waves they gathered silently ;
Then, ere the day was done,
Pushed off, and looking on their home no more,
Smote the grey furrows of the desert sea.

III.

And out beyond the Cyclads took their way,
The blue *Æ*gean's coronal of isles ;
Beyond the Lotos-fields, and that dark bay
Whose Siren-song poor mariners beguiles ;
Past the fierce Cyclops' forge and *Æ*tna's pain,
And marked afar Phœacia's bossèd peaks :
And ever on, by Atlas and the gate
Of the untraversed main ;
And found at last the woods and pleasant creeks
Of that fair island bower inviolate.

IV.

Atlantis, loveliest of all earthly shores,
Peopled around—so runs the ancient tale—
Through many an upland glen among the moors,
And many a deep ravine and sinuous vale—
By a fair race most beauteous and bright,
The same who from their home went forth and woke
The nations to fierce war, and overcame
All lands in their young might :
Till mortal arms and more than mortal stroke
Blasting them, left the memory of a name.

V.

Atlantis !—I have seen it in my dreams,
When the cold moon traced o'er the silent deep
Her tremulous path, and silvered the dark streams
Of shadowy-peopled ocean, and the steep
Of many a cavern'd cliff. Have I not strayed
Through trellised groves of woven mystery,
Wrapped in pale twilight, in an evening land ;
Where each melodious glade
Mingles a voice of human sympathy
With the soft moaning of a distant strand ?

VI.

As one who journeys amid Alpine snow
Comes sudden on some still delicious bower,
High-cradled, close to heaven, and o'er it go
The voiceless children of the morning hour :
So are those meadows haunted by the tread
Of poets whose enchanted lays are borne,
Winged with their own delight, through farthest years ;
Or oftentimes visited
By passionate lovers, radiant in the morn
Of thoughts that pierce the ever-whirling spheres.

VII.

It is a wonder fairer than bright sails
Red with the first beam of midsummer dawns ;
Sweeter than the sad voice of nightingales
In the warm south, among palm-shaded lawns.
And there are visions of all beauty seen,
Beauty to mock the painter's deep distress,
And music, whose remembered melody
Would stun the senses keen ;—
Methinks, who once hath drunk such happiness
Need fear not, but go happy till he die.

VIII.

Far from the ways of uncontented men,
That strive and seek, yet seek without an aim,
Driven by the Fury's goad awhile,—and then
Return back, nought accomplished, whence they came :
Where earth's best gifts seem bubbles, and none know
Whether the rainbow joys they prized shall play
One hour about the fountain's mouth, or be
But thoughts that come and go,
Vain semblances that change and pass away,
Like summer glories on a laughing sea.

IX.

And often like a faded revelry
Drags on life's pace, until the mask we wear
Moulds to its blank and grinning mockery
The immortal soul that once lay covered there ;
And pallid Custom with her death-like gloom
Breathes over all, and taints the loveliness
Of earth and sky and ocean, and the pride
Of the world's vernal bloom,
Making each fairest vale a wilderness,
And all its fragrance but a hope belied.

X.

Oh vain lament, and vision yet more vain !
For now Atlantis through dim inland woods
Echoes no more the sea's half-heard refrain,
But lies long sunk beneath the o'erwhelming floods.
And many a hundred wanton Junes have bared
Their starry splendours to the unpeaceful wave ;
And many a hundred winters felt the frown
Of tempests lightning-haired ;
But o'er Atlantis the wild waters rave,
And the dark seawrack tosses up and down.

XI.

“ Change is the law of all things,” saith the sage :
The poet, “ Nothing lives but to decay ” ;
And we, that boast a man’s proud heritage,
What are we, when Time’s hand hath touched our clay ?
Ask of the winds whose moaning voices bear
Sad dirges round the earth from pole to pole ;
Ask of the meteor-flame that shoots from heaven
Swift through the reeling air,
And like the moment’s flash within the soul,
Dies by that force from which its light was given.

XII.

What say you? Can it be that all things here
Lack consummation? Must the summer's rose
Die with the summer, and the flower more dear
Of friendship perish ere the winter's snows?
Is it for nothing that a man shall say—
“Here did I love, there did I find a friend”?
Alas, if tenderest hopes and joys should prove
Shadows of our brief day;
Less than a printed book's dead page—no end
Save dark oblivion of life, hope and love.

XIII.

Ah no, my Friend, that were a thankless creed.—
Look where the sun's path shews diviner gold;
List to the sea-borne breeze's sighing speed,
Telling sweet tales that ne'er on earth were told.
There lies Atlantis still, beyond the sight
Of bodily eyes, though ever through the mist
That comes and goes, I seem to see it gleam
On the last edge of light,
'Twixt earth and heaven, a phantom land sun-kissed
And sun-engendered, joyous as a dream.

XIV.

Out of their dreams men shaped it, long ago,
Out of wild dreams, and strains of sweetest song ;
Out of life's toil, and unseen tears that flow,
And hope, and faith in battle with the wrong :
To be that Spirit's dwelling, which they seek
Throughout the rolling years, and call her name,
Some of them, peerless Beauty, but to some
She seems, who hear her speak,
The very voice of God—yea, even the same
Is Love, that can all others overcome.

XV.

She knows not death ; her spell is potent still
To guide the craftsman's hand, to mould the thought
That brings a world to birth, to feed the skill
Of mighty singers by sweet fancy taught.
To her are borne on every rustling breeze
The voices of the past that cannot die ;
For her the broken hope, the love forgot,
Weave from pale phantasies
A pure eternal counterpart, and ply
The mystic loom of Truth that withers not.

XVI.

Come then, away ; and let us, as is meet,
 Set full the sails of our fair enterprise ;
Not with a faith that droops in the noon's heat,
 And like a flower too perfect, faints and dies ;
Not in mad strife to outpass mortal scope,
 But thanking heaven for our human heart,
For kindly youth and all life's wonderment,
 Make ours a man's best hope,
In the great soul of all to bear a part,
 And having dared and suffered, be content.

XVII.

For on a height is Life's best vintage set,
 Guarded by jealous Pain ; and few may taste
Its draught divine, who with long toil and sweat
 Press onward, till there breaks a gleam at last.—
Unguessed by fools whom cloistered ease debars
 From taste of pain or pleasure, or the power
 Of godhead sown in man, that sets his way
 Among the termless stars.—
Rejoice, that we may catch for one brief hour,
 After long night, some radiance of the day.

XVIII.

Pale overhead the first lone star appears,
And soon the belted huntsman of the skies
Will gaze from heaven, as in forgotten years
He gazed on Memphis and her mysteries.
Cold silent watcher ! thou hast seen the wrack
Of ancient cities, all their pomp and show
Into the tide of God like sand-reeds drawn :
Thou too on our dark track
Haply wilt shine, and bring, when time drags slow,
Hope of the unextinguishable dawn.

XIX.

For we will seek Atlantis; we will go,
With courage high and canvas all unfurled,
Over life's untried sea, intent to know
The hidden ways of this mysterious world.
So perhaps,—strange and dim as is their praise,
Though glorious still, who tempted first new skies
And unknown seas—some thing which we have done
May sound in the after days;
Like an old song in wintertime that cries
Out of the past one moment, and is gone.

Feb. 1910.

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Ernest Blifton -

29 Sept. 1910



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